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SUBJECT: ENGAGING KARZAI'S INNER CIRCLE ON ELECTIONS AND
SECOND TERM

Classified By: Deputy Ambassador Frank Ricciardone; Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: The Embassy continues to engage both Karzai and Abdullah confidants to prevent political slippage and to solidify our message before the November 7 presidential run-off. We are recognizing President Karzai's correct but difficult decision to accept a second round and the pivotal role influential Karzai and Abdullah supporters played in breaking the political impasse. We are emphasizing the importance of, and our commitment to, a secure and credible second round, reiterating our "hands off" policy regarding the terms of a possible unity government, and encouraging Afghan leaders to help restore and strengthen our countries' shared principles and long-standing friendship. Finally, we are raising the need for a common strategy amenable to both the Afghan and American people. As part of this effort, Ambassador Eikenberry met October 23 with Karzai's First VP running mate Marshal Fahim; MPs Abdurab Rassoul Sayyaf and Mohammad Mohaqqueq, and the Speaker of the Meshrano Jirga (Upper House) Mojadeddi. End Summary.

¶2. (S) After helping Afghanistan overcome its electoral crisis, we continue our active engagement with both Karzai and Abdullah inner circles to avoid political slippage and to consolidate our message in the lead up to the November 7 run-off. In Ambassador Eikenberry's October 23 conversations with Karzai's First VP running mate, ex-Jihadi Marshal Fahim Qasim; MP and former Jihadi, Professor Abdurab Rassoul Sayyaf; Speaker of the Meshrano Jirga, Professor Hazrat Sebghatullah Mojadeddi; and MP Mohammad Mohaqqueq, we recognized President Karzai's correct but difficult decision to accept the run-off, and the pivotal role influential Karzai and Abdullah supporters played in breaking the political impasse. The Ambassador emphasized the importance of holding a secure and clean second round in accordance with the Afghan Constitutional and Electoral Law and reaffirmed commitment to this effort -- while reiterating our "hands off" policy regarding the terms of a potential Abdullah withdrawal from a second round in return for Karzai's support for a reformist national unity platform, or even a Karzai-Abdullah unity government. We encouraged these influential Afghan leaders to help restore and strengthen the long-standing shared fundamental principles and friendship between our two countries and peoples. We also encouraged President Karzai's inner circle to help him gain traction on his proposed compact with the Afghan people, which will serve to strengthen our bilateral relationship and help us create a common strategy amenable to both the Afghan and American people.

Marshal Fahim -- Agreeing to Disagree

¶3. (S) Marshal Fahim welcomed the Ambassador's points, asserting that a second round was the best option for Karzai and the country. He underscored the need to move beyond the

recent bilateral setbacks. The United States is key to Afghanistan's international relations, remarked Fahim, adding that he has always been a friend of "the eagle" America, the only nation that could truly help Afghanistan. Fahim reminisced how he had urged Northern Alliance leader Massoud to work with America, even though "extremist mullahs Rabbani and Sayyaf" had objected. And, despite Taliban, Hekmatyar, and Rabbani accusations that Fahim had betrayed Afghanistan, Fahim had retorted that Afghans must work with Americans to resolve Afghanistan's problems. Complicating Afghanistan's ability to implement democracy, were a range of cultural, tribal, and religious considerations, along with high illiteracy, explained Fahim. The lack of education, combined with years of foreign occupation, has led many Afghans to distrust foreigners. They do not realize that nowadays the world is a "small family" and that some countries want to help, rather than occupy Afghanistan.

14. (S) Fahim recounted how even after Karzai had removed him as Defense Minister, he had still urged Karzai to work with the United States for peace and stability for all Afghans. Along these lines, after the election, "we must develop a strategy to work together for a better future", he said, offering to advance this cause in public and in private. Claiming he was the one who had finally convinced Karzai to mend relations with the United States and accept the second round, Fahim asserted that this is the only way to succeed over the next five years. The Ambassador informed Fahim of the loss of 50 U.S. soldiers and marines during the first round process, and noted our readiness to make further sacrifices of blood and treasure in a runoff. A sympathetic Fahim prayed that there would be no further loss of life.

15. (S) Fahim outright rejected the idea of a Karzai-Abdullah coalition, noting Afghanistan's past disastrous experience with coalition governments. However, a Karzai and Abdullah understanding for a national platform could be helpful, he said. "Just as President Obama had brought his rival Hillary Clinton into government and had kept Defense Secretary Gates from the previous Bush administration." These types of accommodations likewise could make Afghanistan stronger, ventured Fahim (Note: this is a common refrain here, reflecting a lack of understanding of U.S. politics but still helpful in discussing possible alignments. End Note.) The Ambassador then shared with Fahim our discussions with Karzai and his ministers regarding five fundamental shared priorities, which could serve as a compact with the Afghan people and a blueprint for cooperation and partnership:

--Assent Sovereignty: Strengthen army and police; place all detentions in Afghan hands, eliminate private foreign security companies;

--Support Afghan reconciliation and reintegration efforts;

--Encourage regional dialogue and ensure Afghanistan's long-term security among its neighbors;

--Create and implement better development programs with an emphasis on direct funding to certified Afghan ministries; and,

--Help Afghans improve law enforcement and governance, and find ways to reduce corruption and narco-trafficking.

Fahim expressed interest in the concept and offered to facilitate it.

Sayyaf - I Can Read Karzai's Mind

16. (S) Thanking "Professor"/MP Sayyaf for his constructive role over the past weeks, the Ambassador remarked that our bilateral tensions date back to the Bush era, and the change in U.S. administrations naturally has brought a change in the ways we conduct our relations and the way we see and state our strategic interests. We need to accept that we will

disagree on occasion over certain tactics or policies, but we must focus on shared common interests and principles, the Ambassador offered. Asserting he had convinced Karzai that a good relationship with the United States was essential and a second round required, Sayyaf claimed that "I can read Karzai's mind." He assured us that "Karzai knows he has no viable alternative than going with you side-by-side." Sayyaf had urged Karzai to address his differences with the United States in private and refrain from confrontation in the media. "We are on the same ship and must take it to safety," remarked Sayyaf, who was confident that "we will see some positive changes and we have the opportunity to renew our friendship." Despite the recent setbacks, Karzai remains the best option at this point in history, argued Sayyaf, who offered to broker better relations. Sayyaf was also receptive to the five fundamental shared priorities, which could serve as a compact with the Afghan people and a blueprint for cooperation and partnership, also with the U.S. and coalition partners.

17. (S) The Ambassador suggested Karzai can help us gain momentum through his inaugural speech, by calling for national unity and announcing a vision for a more secure and prosperous future. Karzai and the Afghan people should first reach an agreement, which in turn will lead to strong U.S.-Afghan agreement. From these actions, we may forge a collaborative, rather than unilateral, strategy. The Ambassador explained he had discussed these matters with President Obama the previous evening. They had concurred that we should design a combined strategy that would cover both military and civilian participation. Karzai could jointly announce such an initiative with a NATO and U.S. leader. Karzai could deliver a second message to Afghans and the world community that these new US/NATO forces are not foreign mercenaries but, rather, would come at Afghan request to help build Afghanistan and to help protect the Afghan people until Afghans can take over all security. Further, Karzai could be most helpful by thanking the U.S. military and the American people for sacrificing their sons, daughters, fathers, and mothers. These messages would restore confidence in the relationship. Voicing his support for this approach, Sayyaf promised his support and offered to arrange meetings with the Embassy and appropriate Afghans to advance this initiative. "We have no other job than this; our lives are tied to the success of this struggle," he concluded.

Mojaddedi -- If More Troops, for Training, not Combat

18. (S) Ambassador Eikenberry began by acknowledging that Professor Mojaddedi's role had been pivotal in the lead-up to the decision on a second round, and offered his thanks for having helped both sides see the way forward. He reviewed many of the points made in the other meetings, in particular the fact that the U.S. is committed to a second round although open to accepting another kind of outcome. Mojaddedi replied that he had promised to "deliver" Karzai and he had done so, while the Ambassador had promised not to force a coalition and had also kept his word. However, Mojaddedi then pointedly asked if the Ambassador "had anything" from the Abdullah camp regarding specific numbers of ministries they wanted. The Ambassador replied no, and that if there were talks between the two camps we hoped it would not consist of a division of ministries but would instead focus on programs for the next five years in areas such as sovereignty, economic development, reconciliation and governance. Mojaddedi agreed, noting in addition the importance of clean and qualified cabinet ministers to carry out new programs.

19. (S) Expanding on the ongoing U.S. strategy review on Afghanistan, the Ambassador asked Mojaddedi's opinion on the issue of increasing U.S. troop levels. Mojaddedi strongly advocated that either no new troops be sent, or that if they are sent that it be for a training function, not combat, in part so that fewer U.S. soldiers would die in battle. He

also claimed that improvements in coordination would make better use of the existing ANSF, and agreed with the Ambassador that the Afghans should be trying to assert a leading role in their own security.

¶10. (S) The conversation returned to handicapping the elections. The Ambassador stated that Karzai had demonstrated nationwide support and would therefore probably do well in a second round, especially if he could get out the vote in the South and East. Mojaddedi said that he had received a call from someone close to the Taliban who allegedly said that "we'll be on Karzai's side and keep the disturbances down - just don't negotiate with Abdullah!"

Mohaqqueq

¶11. (S) With Hazara powerbroker Mohaqqueq, Ambassador Eikenberry made his points about U.S. policy and our goal of supporting a second round of elections, unless an alternative solution is achieved which has the support of the Afghan people. Mohaqqueq noted that his people had always supported the United States, especially since they knew what a debt of gratitude they owed for the U.S. fighting alongside the Hazaras against the Taliban. He said that Shias and Hazaras in Afghanistan have no problems with the U.S. and its plans to support "democracy, development and peace" and would only point out that central Afghanistan (Hazarajat) has been relatively under-resourced.

¶12. (S) Mohaqqueq said that he had delivered fifty percent of the Hazaras in the first round and could deliver more in the second round since Bashardost, an ethnic Hazara, would not be on the ballot. He said that therefore he had told Karzai that "if the ECC declares you the winner, that's good; if not there is no problem with a second round. "On troop levels, Mohaqqueq advised that more troops are a good idea because neighboring countries are exporting violence into Afghanistan. He pledged that if Karzai lost, he would be part of a "peaceful opposition." He said that he had no problem with a deal with Abdullah but it should "not be a coalition or power-sharing." The Ambassador agreed, and also noted that Hazaras' tragic history should make them even more supportive of equality for all ethnic groups under a democratic system.

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